

EX. 1857. 137
400. A. 2

EX. 1851. 137

~~400. A. 2~~

~~43. D. 82~~

Potter

copy [B]

A LETTER

TO

ONE OF THE COMMISSIONERS

FOR THE

EXHIBITION OF 1851:

BEING REMARKS ON THAT PART OF THE SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS WHICH
RECOMMENDS THE TEACHING OF PRACTICAL DESIGN AS APPLIED TO CALICO PRINTING
BY THE STATE,

BY EDMUND POTTER,

REPORTER TO THE JURY ON PRINTED FABRICS,
CLASS 18, IN THE EXHIBITION.



LONDON:

JOHN CHAPMAN, 142, STRAND.

MANCHESTER: JOHNSON, RAWSON, AND CO., CORPORATION STREET.

1853.

26.11.64.

Comments to the
23

RECENTLY PUBLISHED, PRICE ONE SHILLING.

CALICO PRINTING AS AN ART MANUFACTURE:

A LECTURE

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF ARTS, APRIL 22ND, 1852.

BY EDMUND POTTER.

LONDON: JOHN CHAPMAN, 142, STRAND.

MANCHESTER: JOHNSON, RAWSON, AND CO., CORPORATION STREET.

(1852)

A LETTER, &c.

DEAR SIR,

I have received, with the compliments of her Majesty's Commissioners of the Exhibition of 1851, their second Report. I cannot avoid, for reasons which I will try to explain, offering a few remarks on certain parts of that Report; more particularly upon those which suggest the teaching of Practical Designing to Calico Printers. I address them to your notice specially, because I can venture to do so in a more familiar and practical style than it would be good taste in me to do to the Commissioners themselves. I can also claim from you credit for the opinions I may express, from your knowledge of the fact that long practical experience, and a certain position in the Print trade, entitle me to offer them with some confidence.

I extract part of the conclusion of the Report, as follows:—

“ In the preceding part of the Report we have shown, by pointing to the many institutions so liberally supported both by the public and the State, the injustice of the reproach to this country, that it makes no efforts for the promotion of science and art: but we have confessed likewise, that though a larger amount of money is spent for those objects in this Metropolis than, perhaps, in any country,

yet this is the only country which has neither supplied (in any practical or systematic shape) scientific nor artistic instruction to its industrial population; nor provided, for men of science and art, a centre of action, and of exchange of the results of their labours, affording at the same time the means of establishing the connexion between them and the public which would secure permanent relations of reciprocal influence.

"Yet this country, as the centre of the commerce and industry of the world, would seem to require, more than any other, to have these wants supplied; and the Great Exhibition of 1851 has, in its results, convinced us that, unless they be speedily satisfied, this country will run serious risk of losing that position which is now its strength and pride."

As regards the Print trade, I think some of these conclusions are not arrived at on sound data. It surely exhibits, neither in its progress nor position, the necessity for the State's care, to provide for scientific or artistic instruction to its industrial population. The Report of the Jury on Printed Fabrics, class 18 in the Exhibition, made at the request of the Commissioners themselves, warrants no such conclusion as they have arrived at;—on the contrary, it shows the rapid progress of the trade, unparalelled by almost any other (except the entire Cotton trade itself,) by its increase from a production of eight millions of pieces per annum in 1831, to upwards of twenty millions in 1850,—and reports an equally progressive improvement in chemical and mechanical science.

This is acknowledged by ~~our~~ competitors in all parts of the world,—pointedly so by the duties and prohibitions on our productions existing in almost every continental country, (Switzerland and Holland, and one or two others, to their honor excepted.)

These duties are retained to prevent our competing with them, not merely in staple goods, but in high class goods, where taste greatly aids the consumption; this, too, whilst in our own market, foreign prints are admitted free. France admits this decidedly; and with superior taste in her fine goods, (from causes easy of explanation,) prohibits us in her market, and shuns the competition we court.

A careful examination of every specimen of printed fabric in the Exhibition certainly led the Jury to no such timid conclusion as that promulgated by the Commissioners,—“that this country (or the Print trade, particularly selected by the offer of aid,) will run serious risk of losing that position which is now its strength and pride.” For myself (I believe my opinions will be those of a large majority of the trade when consulted,) I really have no fears of any retrograde movement—or even pause. Remembering how our position has been gained without any State petting or aid, and how consolidated by the recent Free Trade measures, I know not how to account for such an expression of opinion.

The same self-interest and individual energy will still arise to watch for and reward every chemical and mechanical discovery, and to carry on the same progressive improvements in taste and execution which have marked, more strongly in this country than in any other, the progress of the trade for years past. Every advantage of locomotion our competitors may gain will surely be ours also, perhaps in more than an equal degree. I know not, then, why

the position we have attained should be held to be in so critical a state.

The results of the Exhibition, certainly, to those who possessed a *real* knowledge of the trade, apart from what was to be gained there, were not those to induce timidity or fear: the printers have since shown none; and who else can form so sound an opinion? To the printer in active business, there was exhibited very little that had not previously come under his observation, that too without the most essential information which he possessed, viz., the comparative cost of production. He would hardly judge of the state of his trade from the Exhibition, when aware of the fact that not one-sixth part of its number exhibited at all,—and that many of those who did, did so more from feelings of deep personal respect to the Illustrious Prince who was its projector, and on high moral grounds, than as any trial of strength with their foreign competitors.

It was no surprise to the printer that his French competitor exhibited finer goods than his own—more attractive, as allowing more scope for design. It gave him no anxiety as to the stability of his own trade, to see such productions; nor do I believe it tempted any one to deviate much in his course, and attempt the production of goods more naturally suited to French than to English labour and capital.

I have reason to believe that our foreign competitors were much more surprised by our productions (limited as was the exhibition) than we were with theirs.

Am I then to refer the fears of the Commissioners' conclusions (not drawn from our necessities certainly,) to the reports of the advantages other countries are supposed to derive from schools of practical teaching supported by the State ;— am I to suppose these are referred to as examples of what we might be if our Government adopted a similar course ?

I can take a deep interest, and appreciate highly, the information contained in Dr. Playfair's Reports ; but I differ widely as to the conclusions to be drawn from them. I do not doubt that there is very much good in the schools as reported, to the countries wherein they are established, but much of downright evil if forced upon us with our very different habits, institutions, and trade. The teaching needed under despotism and prohibition, either of thought or trade, will necessarily be different from that we need, if any be requisite.

As regards the practical results of Government teaching in those States themselves,—it does not enable them to offer us any competition in cost or taste, except as regards the latter from France ; and no French goods come here, except those of a very fine description, and in very small quantity.

Those States which take the most trouble in teaching trade art, prevent the only test of the *value* of that teaching, by prohibiting competition in the *open market* we invite.

I make the admission that the highest class goods in Calico Printing (which technically means printing on silks, woollens, or cottons,) are produced in France,

—I have before endeavoured to account for it.* I can admire, and I hope, estimate, this taste; but I come to the conclusion that we may attain as high a degree of excellence in any part of the trade desirable or beneficial for us to follow, without adopting an unsound example and policy.

I will try to explain.—We differ from France in our political and commercial policy most completely. The State wishes to manage everything in France: gives extravagant *fêtes*; promotes and pays for public and out-door amusements; exhibits an overloaded and voluptuous taste, and creates a demand for decorative art which we do not possess. Are we to be blamed because we do not produce for it? Paris is the world's model in millinery and upholstery, on account of this demand. France ("the Emperor,") pays for, and forces taste in jewellery,—now by the order of a crown—it may be two,—and now by *thousands* of pounds spent in bracelets and necklaces, *etc.*, for actresses, singers, and ballet dancers, or other public talent.

The effect is that this taste being fostered *by demand*, finds the power of supply, not only for Paris, but for the other capitals of Europe. France cannot if it would, create a demand for staple goods such as we excel in. The experiment was tried under republicanism, to find occupation for the masses. It was too *costly*, too unwieldy to manage; and very unsound in principle.

Suppose a million per annum so spent amongst the same amount of population in our own metropolis, by

* Lecture on Calico Printing.

a lavish, reckless court. It would add to the taste of a certain class—elevate it doubtless,—but how would it fare with the taste and morals of the class most taxed for it? And after all, what is the value, commercially, of this expensive and fine taste which I admit we do not produce equally with the French;—had not our taste better be allowed to follow comfort in England, and not forced to precede it, as in France?

The fact of the very small importation of French prints into our market shows the very limited consumption of costly goods. I do not suppose the quantity imported and retained for our home consumption (many are re-exported to our Colonies and elsewhere) to be more than $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. on the quantity of our production—in value they are of course much greater—but chiefly so on account of the expensive material on which they are printed. Light, elegant, short-lived both in taste and fabric, they show the French character in dress. They suit the English consumption to a certain small extent only; and whatever degree of excellence our own taste may arrive at, still a quantity of these goods (it can hardly be smaller) will be wanted to supply the desire of novelty and fashion in our higher classes. I know not why it should not be so. I have elsewhere expressed the opinion that if the Paris market was open to the English printer, he would return the compliment by a much larger supply of goods of a different, perhaps not inferior taste. I very much doubt whether, as a mere question of good taste, (apart from execution,)

the French do not produce a larger proportion of bad and absurd designs to supply the demand for novelty, than ourselves. French taste is over-estimated also, I believe, from the great advantage they possess of working on a finer material. Test ours on the same material,—give a fair competition on calico,—not one on *silk* and *woollen*, and the other on *cotton*, and a fairer decision will be arrived at.

I have dwelt too much on this point, perhaps: but French taste is so much quoted, and has been so long admitted better than our own, that I am compelled to believe it is to this competition, the expressed anxiety of the Commissioners must refer.

I can hardly conclude that the Commissioners would recommend the establishment of a School of Practical Art,—(or trade teaching) for calico printers,—without some further evidence in favour of the necessity for it. A Report of Mr. Redgrave's, published with the Jury Reports, is referred to as "a valuable Report on Design,"—interesting, I certainly thought it when it appeared, as conveying the opinions of a man of undoubted taste and talent in his *own* profession; but when the opinions therein expressed, freely—perhaps I may be allowed to say dogmatically—and with evidently very little knowledge on the subject as regards calico printing, are adopted in some degree by the Commissioners; and when I find him quoted as the Associate of the Director of the proposed School of Practical Art, I feel certainly no hesitation in canvassing his report, and protesting most strongly against practical conclusions, drawn, as I think I

have shewn, from unpractical opinions, and unfair to the extensive trade they are intended to affect. I will, however, refer to those parts of Mr. Redgrave's report upon which I possess a practical knowledge, leaving you to draw your own conclusions.

I would not willingly misquote Mr. Redgrave; but his sweeping charges appear to embrace all manufacturers,—he makes few exceptions,—and as my own trade is specially selected as needing instruction, I am led to suppose his observations embrace *that* at least. In his preliminary remarks he says, “Manufacturers are eager to obtain novelty at any sacrifice of truth and taste.” Mr. Redgrave's opinion is natural to an artist; as a manufacturer he would cease to hold it, without, I believe, *sacrificing anything to truth*. As an artist, Mr. Redgrave may follow his own good taste. His genius and labour produce the painting for which its value and his reputation find him a customer, who, to appreciate and purchase it must be a man of wealth and taste. Mr. Redgrave's supply is below the demand; he has, therefore, the power of gaining a reward for his genius, and at the same time advancing taste, and a high standard of art. Contrast the manufacturers' position;—“eager,” as he states, to obtain novelty at any sacrifice of truth, and at any cost; they are dependent upon extent of demand; upon the whims or tastes of their customers. They are not like the artist—the arbiters of taste,—except so far as connected with execution; and be a pattern or a score of patterns ever so frightful, drawn in China by natives, sent to them with orders

to be imitated, they must be done to a hair's breadth, even to their very imperfections, or they will be rejected. Is there any more bad taste in this than in Mr. Redgrave's painting, *honestly*, an ugly woman? The printers, then, are only to a very limited degree responsible for the taste they exhibit; to that extent I claim for them, as a body, as great an anxiety to lead, purify, and exalt taste, as any other class of manufacturers or artists, producing for the consumption or supply of the same classes of society. Nay more,—our first-class printers are constantly before their demand. Every one knowing anything of the trade will admit the often profuse expense they incur; and I would add what is within the experience of many,—that had they kept more level to the taste of their customers, they would have been better compensated. The printer, like the artist, has station, reputation, and ambition, and like him he is fearful of losing caste: he is scarcely so ignorant, either, as to retrograde in one of the main elements of his trade—taste.

Mr. Redgrave asserts that “whenever ornament is wholly effected by machinery, it is certainly the most degraded in style and execution; and the best is to be found in those manufactures and fabrics wherein handicraft is entirely or partially the means of producing the ornament.”

Mr. Redgrave, artist-like, dreads machinery, from the fear of bad repetitions: the manufacturer encourages it to the greatest possible extent, as equally useful for cheap, and good repetitions. The manufacturer thinks machinery the greatest possible

blessing to society and even to taste, as enabling him to multiply a thousand-fold, the genius and mind of the artist, cheapened so as to gladden, refine, and civilize thousands, rather than select classes. The manufacturer knows that it is the extent of demand from these multitudes which affords him infinitely the best reward, and he gladly improves, and cheapens, the supply. Science, and machinery its result, are his agents.

The Commissioners, equally with myself, wish for such results ; and I trust we shall not ultimately differ in the mode of obtaining them. They must arise from cheapness and plenty, giving comfort first, and taste as a luxury afterwards.

One great difficulty I have ever noticed in connecting art with manufactures,—the constant dread in the artist's mind, of too rapid progress,—the fear of machinery in Mr. Redgrave's case,—the fear of innovation, and departure from rules and standards of art,—the constant endeavour to make manufacture bend to art, rather than to make art subservient to the comforts and luxuries of life, and the constant reference to the poor rewards and neglect of artists, not *now* founded in fact, either as regards literature or trade.

I regret to follow Mr. Redgrave in similar opinions, honestly meant no doubt, but surely narrow-minded ; showing very little faith in human nature and progress. Stamped as these opinions are by the authority of the Commissioners, I can hardly avoid it. Surely it was not good taste to refer to the Juries in a remark like the following :—

“ Even in the Great Exhibition the question of *design* was nearly overlooked, and the works of the designer left without a place : his name was not necessarily coupled with the fabrics or manufactures his skill had designed or decorated : and his reward was left, therefore, to the good feeling of his employer. No Special Jury was named to unite with the manufacturers in the various classes, in judging of the taste and art displayed in the ornamentation of their fabrics ; and that art, which as we have before said is calculated, when excellent, to raise the reputation of a nation's manufactures, was left to the judgment of those too likely to consider, not its real excellence, but what an untaught multitude would purchase and would prize.”

This, too, after instructions such as the following had been given to the Juries on Textile Fabrics :—

GROUP C.—MANUFACTURES.—TEXTILE FABRICS.

“ In this, those articles will be rewarded which fulfil in the highest degree the conditions specified in the Sectional list, namely,—increased usefulness, such as permanency in dyes, improved forms and arrangements in articles of utility, &c. ; superior quality, or superior skill in workmanship ; new use of known materials ; use of new materials ; new combinations of materials ; beauty of design in form or colour, or both, with reference to utility ; cheapness, relatively to excellence of production.”

If the Jurors were not supposed competent to decide upon the taste even of the articles in their various classes, why were they selected : if the Kingdom, or the World afforded not the body competent to arrive at a decision, surely the State is not going to attempt to appoint arbiters of taste, and the deciders of what is truth and what otherwise,—what ought to be encouraged and what condemned.

You will do me the justice to remember that

I condemned, perhaps rather strongly, the project of giving prizes, or deciding upon what was, or was not, taste in pattern and design, in the very earliest stages of the Exhibition: that opinion was strongly shared by others who did not perhaps care to express it.

Surely by Mr. Redgrave's remark that in France many large establishments have well-appointed schools attached, for teaching drawing, modelling, and the rudiments of science connected with *their* manufactures, it is not intended to infer that such facilities are not offered by the English manufacturer. If we do not attain to a high standard, it has not been for the want of an expenditure, certainly in many cases liberal, if not lavish, and which has frequently obtained the aid of the best artists this country or France could afford; directed, too, by the practical knowledge of men of education and taste of the very highest class; men who could appreciate art, and who have fostered it in every way; and who would be the last to fail to lend a helping hand to genius, more particularly if found in their own employ.

Surely such men would have the wish to encourage and value it as a trade commodity, if they are not to have credit for any higher motive. There can be, in my estimation, no more injudicious friend to the trade artist, than the one who wants to forward his claims by an injudicious estimate of his value and position. Like all the rest of us in trade, his talent finds its level. If he have applicable practical taste, he easily gains his reward,—such reward being the exact value

the printer can afford to pay for art, as a constituent part of his production.

Take the following opinion from Mr. Redgrave, which I give at length, upon the position the artist ought to take :—

“ It has already been stated that this Report originated in the consideration of “ Designs.” It is proper, therefore, that the works of the designer should be examined and commented on before the manufactures to the construction or for the ornamentation of which they were intended to be applied. From the artists we have a right to expect that true taste, that scientific knowledge, and those sound principles too often wanting in the manufactured works. The difficulties to be overcome in the various processes, or the limited resources of the manufacturer, together with the influence of public taste on the demands of the market, may form some excuse for the manufacturer if his efforts are imperfect, or directed to sale rather than to excellence. But the designer has so long exclaimed against the bondage which has obliged him to please the public and the manufacturer at the sacrifice of his own better judgment, that he ought gladly to have seized upon the present opportunity to exhibit a faith and practice of his own. Now, at least, he was at liberty to appeal to the few, and, untrammelled by any conditions, to exhibit his own powers, his own knowledge, taste, and better judgment, to lead men to the appreciation of the simple and the chaste as the true source of the beautiful. Another reason for commencing with the examination of the works of the artists, was, that if the stream was pure at the fountain, the blame would justly lie with those who afterwards defiled it; or, in plain words,—if the designer were proved to have set a good example in his works, false taste, where found, might be placed at the door of the manufacturer; while, on the contrary, some allowance might be made for him if the authorised teacher were wanting in taste and true principles.”

Practically, the designer for calico printers has

often, in past years, more particularly when the knowledge and taste in the trade were far inferior, freed himself from all bondage, and used his own taste; how practically, or rather how fruitlessly, Mr. Redgrave might easily have ascertained.

I know dozens of artists whom only a painful practical experience could convince that nothing but following the taste of the customer, not their own, could repay the printer. The lesson may not be so easily taught to the State, perhaps, because the cost of the experiment will not be so keenly and readily felt; but I know no reason for supposing that the results would be different.

Some of our leading printers, during the present century, have been designers educated practically to the trade—rising by their own merit, taste, and industry. There is every facility in a trade like ours, every day supplied from the skilled workmen with junior partners, for talent to raise itself. What bar is there, then, to any taste really worth having, being tested? None whatever. Why should the artist be taught, and educated by the State, beyond the chemist, the mechanic, nay those who need it most, as most helpless, the very labourer himself.

Mr. Redgrave admits that “there is no subject which comes under review in his Report, of more importance than the consideration of design as applied to garment fabrics,” and proceeds to give his opinion that “the great sources of error in designing for garment fabrics are over ornamentation, and attracting undue attention to ornament.”

As regards the print trade, I believe him to be greatly in error. The supply of printed goods for our home trade—our best qualities, and about perhaps one-fourth of our production—is chiefly for the middle and lower classes, in useful staple goods. Now I will venture to assert that fully *four-fifths* of the patterns for this part of our production are of a quiet, unobtrusive taste, neat and simple; and affording no great scope for, and using little ornamentation, the greater pains are bestowed on quality and execution. The taste of the consumer is well supplied, and if the printer attempt to deviate from it he suffers. If bad taste and forced novelty do exist, (and I do not deny it,) it is in the remaining part of our supply, intended to meet the taste and demand of the highest and lowest classes—fine goods for the one, and coarse, vulgar, printed cottons or woollens for the other.

I do not mean to assert that part of the higher class demand is not for a pure and good taste, far from it—but this demand is *very* limited, and in great part scarcely varies from the middle class wear—chiefly so as requiring finer material only. I have expressed the opinion that the greater part of the English demand is quiet and simple in character, and I fully agree with Mr. Redgrave, “that simplicity is one of the first constituents of beauty, and therefore it will often happen that simple patterns are by far the most beautiful,” but our demand is so distributed as not to enable the printer to employ himself in producing simple patterns chiefly; more than three-fourths of

our production is for export to all parts of the world, the smallest quantities for the most civilized cities. Paris, with her taste, as I have before stated, prohibits us; many of the Continental States nearly do so. The foreign demand, such as it is, is for a foreign taste, not ours, and though it may be neither good nor simple, it is a duty to ourselves to supply it, so long as it adds at the same time to their comforts and our profits.

Let me briefly remark upon the standard of qualification Mr. Redgrave would require in an art-workman. He asserts, "that the art-workman should know all the processes of the manufacture he is engaged in, is absolutely necessary." Many of us have spent lives of indefatigable industry in all the various occupations connected with the print trade, and yet I know not one (whose opinions at least I should much respect,) who would think himself qualified to fill up Mr. Redgrave's requirements. The artist himself is the inventor and finisher of his production. Not so the manufacturer. The calico printer, for instance, looks to sub-division of labour, and knowledge, as the only means of a perfect and ready supply. He may himself have mercantile knowledge (the first point)—knowledge of his customers' wants. He collects and connects the ideas, directs the taste, purchases the art—(all he requires)—pays for it proportionately, buys chemical and mechanical skill, or such parts as he does not possess, and by sub-division of first-class labour, produces the highest results, *only thus attainable*. The first printer, in the commencement of his trade, resembled the artist. He was, of necessity, artist, printer,

chemist, and manipulator himself: the result was slow, costly, and less perfect. I have known one of the class during my experience; but he has allied himself to sub-divided labour, and finds a living somewhat in contrast to the former picture he presented, of genius struggling with penury and difficulty.

I have dwelt perhaps too much on Mr. Redgrave's opinions; chiefly so because I suppose them to be those upon which the Commissioners recommend the teaching of practical art.

While the Report professes not to enter into any details, the teaching, however, of practical art, viz., pattern designing, drawing of trade patterns, is as announced in the Report to be one means of securing *sound* industrial teaching to our manufacturing population. I object altogether to the State *attempting* to do this, because it is not legitimate and sound economy. If the print trade is prosperous and successful, surely the State has no right to aid and pamper it. If unsuccessful, has the State any right to prop it up at the expense of the people,—to give a bounty for taste,—or is the State (to be *fair* and just,) going to undertake the teaching of practical design to all trades?

Then, as to the knowledge of the teachers,—the Report refers to a letter addressed to the President of the Board of Trade, from Mr. Cole and Mr. Redgrave, submitting an outline of the principles they propose should be adopted in order to carry out the scheme of practical instruction, founded, I presume, on the opinions enunciated in Mr. Redgrave's Report.

Before giving practical reasons against the efficiency of the offered teaching for our trade, I cannot help noticing the latter part of the paragraph in page 33, as shewing the very slight knowledge now possessed on the subject by our instructors. I extract as follows :

“ In like manner, the properly educated designer for printed and woven fabrics ought to be practically familiar with the early chintzes of India, as well as the best specimens of work now produced at Paris, Mulhausen, Crayford, or Accrington.”

I would ask, do the gentlemen who made the Report, or do the Commissioners really suppose, that the calico printers do not possess a knowledge of the every day productions of their own trade ? I will simply assert that fifty houses, within twenty miles of Manchester, and a score in Glasgow and its neighbourhood, (besides numbers of mercantile houses in each place) do possess regular supplies of patterns of everything of any value, produced at the sources referred to, and from many others which the State (without being merchant and printer itself,) never could obtain. With these specimens, which may be laid before the drawer or designer, will of necessity be placed the ten times more valuable trials for patterns, of each separate house, numerous and exceedingly costly, and of which only the selected samples are ever seen by the public. With these, too, is connected in the printer's mind, that real knowledge of which the State-teacher will be thoroughly ignorant, viz., the practicability and cost of execution, and the chances of selling or meeting a demand at a profit when produced.

Again, is this *practical* teaching to be in London, 200 miles from the largest part, and 400 miles from the rest of the trade, excepting a fraction in the neighbourhood of Town?

Possessing no practical information itself,—none worthy the name at least—the State begins a school of practical teaching for one of the most extensive trades in Great Britain; casting a slur on its taste, and marking the producers as illiberal, uneducated men, incapable of appreciating their own position, or the wants of their customers; this, too, without even any fair inquiry as to the facts, other than the criticisms of artists and amateurs, in general taste and knowledge not superior to many of the best men in the trade.

The State cannot teach *practical* art apart from and unconnected with operative printing. There are no legitimate standards of taste or design, *except the demands of the day*, for each particular country or class, varying according to means, climate, complexion, and the thousand prejudices of fashion and custom.

The printer has no past, no school of old masters, except his own experience; few repetitions, except for staple productions—plain almost as a self-coloured calico, (requiring, however, consistent taste shewn in exquisite exactness of execution)—I had almost said we have no veneration; we respect a past print for its recollections of profit, and it may be of beauty, but the very worst thing we can do, is to recur to it for imitation or copy. The amateur out of the crush of competition, cannot know anything about the past, or the

originality of a present, pattern. The fashion of to-day is useless for to-morrow for the same market. We cannot stay to touch, retouch, or perfect a pattern, without adding to its cost, and retarding the supply—equally injurious.

I have known the pattern books of drawings, of houses who ranked very high amongst us, collections which had been accumulating for years, and the work alone on which had cost probably £10,000,—sold by weight for little better than the price of waste paper; and this not in a solitary instance.

Any quantity of exquisite drawings of past patterns, good in execution and taste, might be bought in Paris at a little better price—it is their value. State productions will be worth nothing beyond this; they may be very good drawings, but useless as patterns.

A State education in practical art, will be an endeavour to supply and force a particular taste, before the consumer is prepared for it. The State must pay the cost while trying to create this taste. The manufacturer cannot waste his time and money in these experiments.—Ought the State?

I will give you a practical illustration of the unsound conclusions which would influence the teaching of the artist and amateur. It will be in the recollection of my colleagues on the Jury, that the two best specimens of printed goods shewn in the Exhibition, were of distinctly opposite classes.—The first a very beautiful specimen of French printed furniture, more nearly a work of art than a manufacture; costly, tedious, and elaborate in execution. The

demand for it necessarily *very* small. Speaking as a printer, I should certainly not be disposed to produce the article with a view to profit, because of its very limited sale, though as far as execution, or even taste went, there would exist no impediment to my doing so,—one or two small printers supply the world's demand. This specimen was exactly the class of pattern which would catch the artist's eye, and be held up as an example,—in fact it has been done.

The second specimen was of a class of work holding out no pretensions to taste so called. It was brilliant in colour, good in execution, and correctly suitable in taste and pattern, for the demand it was intended for, but the amateur would have condemned it at once to the Chamber of Horrors, as not having an atom of taste. It required, however, great scientific knowledge and skill to produce it, and I do not think it could be equalled by any other printer than the producer (except, of course, after very long experience and cost.) It was an article in large demand; and I doubt not correspondingly profitable. Now I would ask you what would be the feelings of contempt with which the owner, or his fellow-printers, would regard the decision, if this specimen were marked as in bad taste, and as a thing not to be encouraged: and with what consistency could you expect them, to pay for, and support schools of design and practical art, on principles of teaching so directly opposite to what they would call common sense.

There is no more unsound opinion current, (and it is encouraged to sanction State interference with the

practical details of trade,) than that the print trade affords great scope for what is called high art and taste ; whilst the facts of the very nature and character of its productions—low priced, from the comparatively humble rank of the mass of its consumers—are carefully concealed. We are abused for producing abominations, by those who forget to point out the market and the recompence for the experimental taste, which they wish the State to furnish and the printer to pay for. I do protest, then, against the justice which allows opinions to be given, which, if followed out, might end in the condemnation of ninety-five out of every hundred patterns produced by us, as not squaring with the ideas of the State teacher ; calling them, too, practical opinions, and founding practical teaching upon them.

That the offered “practical teaching” is hardly needed, may surely be inferred from our past progress. Let any one, possessing (as many of us do) collections of all the best English and French printers’ patterns for the last twenty years, say if our increase in taste has not been progressive with our quantity. In the finer goods it may not be so perceptible ; but in every description of print downwards, to the lowest now produced, the gain is, I would say, most strikingly so. The gaudy, clumsy-headed, and stalked flower patterns, coloured with patches of yellow and blue, popular and profitable twenty years since, would not now be purchased for the lowest mining or agricultural demand, and would inevitably leave a loss for any foreign market.

If the State is to teach design with effect, to any particular class, or to those most needing it, I very much question if it should not be the higher classes. Extravagances of fashion, and absurdities of style, certainly always take their rise *above the middle classes*, but do not descend to those below in their original absurdity; time, and the influence of taste, soften them down. Take for instance one style, —the large-plaided woollen trowsers recently in fashion. Though not beyond their means, in a cheaper class of material, I will venture to predict that our middle classes, and our better class of working artizans, who exhibit ~~in~~ almost every variety of style in their Sunday habiliments, never adopt the extreme class of pattern I allude to. The absurdity is too strong for their taste.

We are blamed for want of simplicity, though I believe we really have more than many other trades, in all of which the same fault is apparent. For instance, ask a London upholsterer for any article of furniture —good, plain, bold, and simple in character; his answer invariably is,—I can make it for you, but I could not sell it if I had it, I have no demand;—it would not *look* the cost, like an over-decorated article, and therefore would not pay to keep in stock. Again, will you condemn the paper printer for the gay cheap paper, perhaps twopence per yard, which pleases, and adorns the sitting-room of the mechanic. It meets the owner's taste, why should he not have it? It may be even in better taste, in his dingy room, and in better contrast with his swarthy hands and com-

plexion, (which he has neither time nor cheap soap to improve,) than the modest small drab or buff pattern, such as the middle and higher classes would choose for a bedroom or a passage. Or again,—let any one cast his eye around him in the drawing-rooms of the last West End Terrace, gaily papered to please their occupants, and say why the manufacturer should be blamed for supplying either class according to their wishes,—why should he make a martyr of himself, or submit to be made one, to satisfy some undefined taste not yet a demand.

It is an easy occupation to discuss taste; easier still to abuse the bad and quote the good in expensive, costly examples—to avoid altogether the question of demand; but not so easy to supply the deficiency, when the power of doing so is curtailed by price. The amateur takes no note of this; it is no part of his business; his practical teaching would end here; he would leave *that* to the manufacturer. Talk of beauty, and the examples of Sevres china—produced at a loss to the State, in France, (I believe I am correct in making the statement,) of 12, or £13,000 per annum, to the maker of every-day pottery ware, as an example for him. To discourse on French taste in silks, muslins, and cashmeres, to the printer producing for the multitude, as examples, may be very amusing, but scarcely very practical. If you would try to influence public taste at all, supposing it to be the State's province to do so, it surely ought to be by slower and more practical degrees: by not going so far in advance of your customers as that they will

never be able to overtake you. You must be practical manufacturers yourselves, before you pretend to teach the theoretical in connexion with production. Through this process the State *cannot* follow and therefore most assuredly its teaching will fail.

As an illustration of this part of my subject, I had the pleasure of hearing, last spring, Mr. Digby Whyatt's lecture at the Society of Arts, on "An attempt to define the principles which should determine form in the decorative arts." Now it will be admitted that no one is better able to discuss the *general* principles of taste; but I was struck with the difficulty Mr. Whyatt had, when he came to the subject of taste as connected with textile fabrics. Mr. Whyatt had taken considerable pains to illustrate his lecture with various specimens of art manufacture in textile fabrics; and some splendid specimens of figured silks were shown, and dwelt eloquently upon, as the best specimens of taste. They were rich and costly; unattainable except by a few. One dress of English make, a flowered silk, was exhibited, and highly extolled for taste. Naturally enough, I was led to consider what would be the result of the same drawing and form on cotton; and whether there was more of art and taste in this very expensive dress than was really embraced in many of our inferior, not noticed, and perhaps despised prints. I came at once to the conclusion that the majority of these displayed as good drawing, as correct distribution of form, and as good taste, in their productions at fourpence or

fivepence per yard, as was shown in this dress at three pounds the yard.

The cheaper, plainer article, *requires* more taste ; it cannot rely on beauty of material. I honestly believe that we have supplied the requirements ; a fact I am willing to admit not likely to come within the cognizance or experience of Mr. Whyatt, and unknown to those who propose to turn our instructors.

Practical teaching will be worthless, unless tried in practical results. It will hardly be proposed to have a model Government print ground, to reduce to practice higher class taste, (better than the capitalist is now supposed to supply), to set off against private competition—expensive productions, for which there would be no sale, except at great loss, *for mere models*. If so, the £13,000. per annum supposed to be the loss on the Sevres manufactory, would be by no means equal to that on a fancy print works for State pattern producing. Even supposing such an example followed, or such an absurdity sanctioned, many a private printer would still, without much cost to himself, surpass any Government establishment, in any particular class of goods, if worth his while.

Whilst alluding to what we might consider bad taste in dress,—worse, I believe, far, in male attire, in the tailoring department, than anything we, the printers, are charged with supplying to the millinery one—it may be worth while to inquire how far it is right and politic in the State to try and check a harmless supply. Take, for instance again, the large plaid trousers, lectured against as only fit for the Chamber

of Horrors ; even they have furnished a large demand as a novelty to more than one woollen manufacturer, a demand perhaps beyond the regular one for the plainer and genteeler patterns, allowed to be in better taste. Well, the quieter taste is more enduring, but the very novelty of the worse, as any tailor can tell, often forces the extra sale, harmless I suppose we may at least permit it to be, in proportion to its extravagance. Nay, I have seen Royal Commissioners themselves infringing upon the correct in taste in this way. I would ask them, how regulate these things except by demand ? Is it fitting for the State to meddle in these minor morals of taste, as I presume we must now consider them, if trade teaching in taste is to be carried out ? Bloomerism died out, killed by its own bad taste, without being lectured against under State sanction.

You will ask me, What ought the State to teach ? I would answer, simply drawing, elementary and correct drawing ; that, to do it well, will require all the art and taste the State can purchase, for your examples and copies should be of the highest order of art.* The practical application, the after result of this instruction, is *beyond* the State's teaching, and is required in a thousand forms, in various occupations, each requiring a long apprenticeship soundly to apply. Simple as this may seem, you will have work enough for any time your students can afford, without meddling

* It is a curious fact, noticed in a Report of Mr. Wornum's on "French Art Collections and Instructions," that "all inquiries in France seem to lead but to one conclusion,—that *industrial art*, to use a French expression, is there entirely left to private enterprise for its development."

with trade, and trying to teach a smattering on false principles.

If it were a question involving any moral consideration, there might be some grounds for State meddling in trade teaching. I have no wish to enter into the vexed question of State education generally; elementary drawing is a most valuable adjunct to that of every class, and will necessarily tend to develop a better taste, leaving the bias of that taste, as dependent afterwards upon habits, occupation, climate, or the atmosphere of taste the consumers live in, to be supplied by free competition.

You know me to be a supporter of schools of design. I took an active part in the formation and early days of the present Manchester School, and have known something of its progress to the present day. I consider it a capital school for pupils required for pattern drawers. The drawings sent from there, to be exhibited at Marlbro' House, rank amongst the first in the kingdom. Again, as I have asserted, you may have good masters for drawing, but not for pattern designing. If you had, the trade would take them; *they* can afford to outbid any State teacher's salary. Again, why spoil your master, the artist, by forcing him to teach what he does not understand, and what he can have no feeling for.

How, especially, is a London school to succeed? (the Town demand for patterns is but a limited part of ours, and can give no weight or support to one if we do not.) Our Manchester School has done nothing, in my opinion, so contrary to its interest and

success, as the few attempts it has made in pattern drawing. It has been looked upon coldly, because it was supposed to be merely a school to aid particular trades, and not to elevate the taste, and teach the whole community; and the objection had something of soundness in it, so long as it was customary to produce trade drawings. Let it be a school of art, not trade design, and the supposition will not exist.

Mr. Redgrave remarks, I think, that "schools of design have existed ten years, and not yet won the support of the manufacturers." It has not been for want of dabbling in pattern drawing, however. Let them be, as I would venture to suggest,—for the whole, and not a section of the community,—and in ten years more they may win support.

To museums, collections of materials, to exhibitions to any extent, it would ill become me to object. No one can enjoy them more; and I should be the last to wish them supported in a niggardly spirit.

A museum of practical art, so far as connected with the print trade, would hardly, it will be judged from the opinions I have expressed, be worth the trouble of collecting. If it were to be continued, and a practical record of specimens to be preserved, selected from its annual productions, it would require a staff of selectors and keepers of records more costly than any yet allowed for educational purposes. I am supposing, of course, not a mere trade collection of patches or patterns, but a National Print Trade Museum. It is exceedingly difficult to find records of the past progress of the trade. Absurdities in cost,

showy taste, and useless speculations, would find a place in the museum ; whilst the real consumption of the people would, as surely, escape notice, from its quiet, modest, and unchanging character. The collection would be nearly useless to a future generation.

The only error in conduct, of the Exhibition, was the idea of giving large prizes ; it was soundly relinquished. You could not supply the tribunal for decision. Even in the smaller matter of medals, the profuseness of distribution,—an excess of liberality for fear of giving offence, took from them much of their value.

In the offer to give prizes for designs—practical designs—you are falling into the same error ; and seek, besides taking upon yourselves to meddle with trade, to found a tribunal which no one will respect, because it seeks to substitute a foregone conclusion for what must be matter of experience and demand.

The printers may be indifferent, and may not care to offer any opinion, (though I believe the large majority will coincide with me,) simply because they may think the whole matter of very little importance to them. They will estimate any value to be derived from the instruction, just as they would any other amateur teaching.

You will ask why I object to a moderate trial ? On principle—even if it were good. You offer to aid a class whom you choose to suppose inefficient : will you aid all classes,—teach all trades in detail,—or what is better, leave all free to take care of themselves ?

Few of us like to obtrude our opinions, or to force

trade details and our own affairs on the public; still, none of us like to be misrepresented, least of all, pitied and despised for ignorance. I certainly should not have expressed an opinion on the Report, had I not felt in some degree that I owed it as a duty to His Royal Highness Prince Albert, and the remainder of her Majesty's Commissioners, to give my opinions, in virtue of my connection as Reporter to the Jury on Printed Fabrics in the Exhibition.

I may not have expressed myself very clearly;—I wish to do so openly, practically, and not offensively.

To yourself personally I offer no apology: it was owing chiefly to your favorable opinion as to my ability to do so, that I was led to accede to the request to give a lecture on Calico Printing as connected with the Exhibition, (containing similar opinions to those now expressed,) at the Society of Arts, last spring.

I remain, my dear Sir,

Yours truly,

EDMUND POTTER.

DINTING LODGE, GLOSSOP,

Feb. 1, 1853.

Esq.

